Main Sessions

mood/modality

Acquisitive modals in Latvian

Van der Auwera et al. (2009: 272) defines acquisitive modal (AM) as ‘an expression of modality that goes back to a predicate meaning ‘acquire, get’’. AM are found in some of the Circum-Baltic languages and languages of Southeast Asia. Van der Auwera et al. (2009: 285, 289) list dabūt as a candidate for AM in Latvian without giving any further detail. My paper is the first attempt to investigate modal and non-modal meanings of dabūt as well as of another possible AM in Latvian, tikt, as they are reflected in the Latvian corpus (www.korpuss.lv) and other sources on the Internet.

1. As typical of AM in other languages, the Latvian verbs, especially dabūt, can express both participant-external possibility and necessity depending on the context and situation. But Latvian is different in that its AM do not express deontic modality. Actually, the meaning of dabūt and tikt in combination with the infinitive is closest to what Enfield (2003) labels as ‘result of prior event’ with respect to ‘acquire’ verbs in languages of Southeast Asia.

(1) a. Ilgi dabūj-ām gaidī-t.
   long acquire.PST-1.PL wait-INF
   ‘We had to wait long’

   b. Beidzot Helēn-a dabūj-a apsēs-tie-s.
      finally Helen-NOM.SG acquire.PST-3 sit.down-INF-REFL
      ‘Finally, Helen was able to sit down’

(2) Beigās es tik-u ie-t mājās
finally I arriv.eat.PST-1SG go-INF home
   ‘Finally, I could go home’

2. Since the main meaning of tikt is ‘arrive at’ rather than ‘acquire’, it does not precisely fit the definition of AM. Nevertheless, tikt serves as an intransitive equivalent of dabūt in some of its meanings — compare the Lithuanian AM pair gauti ‘acquire’ and tekti ‘be acquired’ in Usonienė & Jasionytė (2010). Both verbs often correspond to a single AM in other languages, for example, English get (Gronemeyer 1999), Swedish få (Viberg 2012), and Estonian saama (Tragel & Habicht 2012).

(3) a. Vis-i dabūj-a balv-as
   all-NOM.PL acquire.PST-3 prize-ACC.PL
   ‘Everybody got prizes’

   b. Balv-as tik-a vis-iem
      prizes-NOM.PL be.acquired.PST-3 all-DAT.PL
      ‘Prizes were received by everybody’

(4) a. Es tik-u virs ūden-s
    I arriv.eat.PST-1SG above water-GEN.SG
    ‘I got above the water’

   b. Viņš dabūj-a galv-u virs ūden-s
      He acquire.PST-3 head-ACC.SG above water-GEN.SG
      ‘He got his head above the water’

(5) a. Es tik-u val-ā no gar-ajiem mat-iem
    I arriv.eat.PST-1SG freedom-LOC.SG from long-DAT.PL.DEF hair-DAT.PL
    ‘I got rid of my long hair’

   b. Es dabūj-u durv-is val-ā
      I acquire.PST-1SG door-ACC.PL freedom-LOC.SG
      ‘I got the door open’


